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Education, skills and livelihood security in the contemporary globalized society

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Abstract

In an era marked by globalization, technological advancement, and growing socio-economic disparities, education plays a crucial role in shaping sustainable livelihoods and resilient communities. This editorial reaffirms the Journal of Education, Society & Sustainable Practice's commitment to advancing interdisciplinary research that connects education, sustainability, and social development. The journal invites submissions that address global challenges and approaches to education and sustainable development. The editorial argues that globalization has transformed the traditional livelihood framework through technological innovation, labor-market restructuring, and market reorientation. The development of human resources is associated with higher output and productivity through improved knowledge and skills. Hence, education and skill development have become central in achieving sustainable livelihoods. The editorial emphasizes the necessity for education to foster adaptive capacity, resilience, and lifelong learning competencies, rather than focusing solely on employment outcomes. It further addresses the growing importance of technical, digital, and transferable skills for navigating dynamic labor markets. The editorial advocates for inclusive, sustainability-oriented education systems that can adapt to changing economic conditions and promote equitable, sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Editorial

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1 Introduction

The new phase of globalization began in the early 1980s and rapidly became a prominent feature of the world economy. Globalization generally seeks to integrate domestic economies with the global economy by removing restrictions on trade, capital flows, and technology transfers. This process results in increased mobility of production factors and deeper integration through trade and investments. The free movement of services, technology, and financial capital is expected to foster competition, enhance productivity, and accelerate foreign direct investment and technology transfer. A liberalized multilateral trade system and technology transfer can benefit countries by promoting economic growth, as reflected in a rightward shift of the domestic production possibility frontier.

Although globalization has expanded economic opportunities through global markets, digital technologies, and new forms of employment, it has also intensified inequality and disrupted traditional work structures (Bardhan, 2007). Globalization has fundamentally transformed the processes by which livelihoods are established, maintained, and adapted (Saha and Pal Chowdhury, 2024). Consequently, livelihood security now depends not only on access to material resources but also on the capacity of individuals and communities to acquire, adapt, and continuously develop their skills (Rahman and Akter, 2012).

Certain characteristics enable individuals to pursue diverse economic activities, with capability closely aligning with the concept of accessibility. Education expands individuals' choices and opportunities by enhancing knowledge, skills, attitudes, initiative, and awareness, thereby improving access to economic opportunities. Education and skills development are therefore central to achieving sustainable livelihood outcomes (Das, 2024). Basic education, knowledge transfer, and skills development are critical for attaining diversified and sustainable livelihoods. Higher education attainment is expected to positively impact livelihood diversification.

The role of education has shifted from serving solely as a pathway to employment to a mechanism for building adaptive capacity in an unpredictable global economy (Hutchinson and Kettlewell, 2015). Similarly, skills are now regarded as dynamic capabilities that must adapt to technological, economic, and environmental changes, rather than as a static qualification (Grama and Todericiu, 2025). Education for sustainable livelihoods, therefore, involves broad-based capacity development, encompassing both formal and non-formal education systems at all levels and emphasizing lifelong learning. This approach connects to a range of livelihood sectors, both established and emerging. The rapid pace of technological change and increasing globalization suggest the need for improved education and training to support sustainable livelihoods and economic competitiveness.

2 Education and changing livelihood pathways

Education is essential for securing diverse livelihoods and ensuring livelihood security. Adopting a sustainable livelihoods perspective integrates multiple disciplines on a common, non-sectoral platform, thereby enhancing the relevance of education to the holistic realities faced by communities. Education for sustainable livelihoods involves comprehensive capacity building, encompassing both formal and non-formal education systems across all levels, as well as lifelong learning. The rapid advancement of technology in the context of globalization highlights the need for enhanced education and training to support sustainable livelihoods.

Globalization has significantly transformed the structure of work. Knowledge-intensive industries, digital platforms, and service-based economies have replaced many traditional employment systems (Khonde and Suresh, 2024). As a result, education systems are under increasing pressure to prepare learners for both initial labor market entry and ongoing transitions across sectors and occupations (Feniser et al., 2025). Although foundational education remains essential, it is no longer sufficient in the current context. Critical thinking, digital literacy, communication, and problem-solving skills are now as important as subject-specific knowledge (Kumar and Prajapati, 2025). These competencies enable individuals to navigate uncertainty and sustain economic participation in changing labor markets. Despite these changing requirements, education systems in many regions remain misaligned with current labor market demands. Curricula are often rigid, outdated, and disconnected from contemporary economic developments. This persistent gap between education and labor markets limits the capacity of education to ensure livelihood security, especially for marginalized communities in society (Albarico, 2024).

3 Skills as the currency of globalization

In the global economy, skills serve as the primary determinant of employability and economic mobility (Ahmad and Tariq, 2025). Technical skills, including digital competencies and vocational expertise, together with transferable skills, adaptability, and teamwork, are essential for workforce success. Rapid skill obsolescence characterizes the contemporary labor market (Molnár et al., 2024). Continuous technological advancement has been transforming job roles. Upskilling and reskilling have become essential to maintain livelihood security.

Nevertheless, access to the skill development process remains unequal in the developing economies (Tyagi et al., 2021). This is mainly due to differential access to skill-based education and training. The elite social classes are highly overrepresented in attaining such an education. Vulnerable populations, such as rural communities, informal workers, and women, face significant barriers to accessing education and training. In the absence of inclusive systems, globalization may exacerbate existing inequalities rather than mitigate them.

4 Lifelong learning and adaptive capacity

Lifelong learning is increasingly recognized as fundamental to livelihood resilience (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2024). It includes formal education, vocational training, workplace learning, and learning with digital and informal platforms. These diverse pathways enable individuals to adapt to changing economic conditions and support transitions between different types of employment. Despite their significance, attainment in lifelong learning shows considerable disparities across countries (Desjardins, 2023). Researchers debate the state's

responsibilities in infrastructure and administration. In some settings, strong public policies and institutional frameworks provide support, while in others, individuals bear most of the responsibility. These imbalances often intensify pre-existing social and economic inequalities. A sustainable model of lifelong learning requires shared responsibility among governments, employers, and educational institutions. Furthermore, it requires formal recognition of informal learning as a valid approach to skills development (Carr et al., 2018).

5 Toward inclusive and sustainable livelihood systems

The relationship between education, skills, and livelihood security is intrinsically linked to broader issues of equity and sustainability (Pani and Mishra, 2022; Roy et al., 2024). Education enhances people's choices and access to economic activities. The expansion of educational opportunities is thus sensitive to a more equitable distribution of income, which reduces income inequality. It is accessibility arising from educational expansion that plays an important role in making a more egalitarian society. Therefore, education systems should adapt to promote employability, foster social inclusion, and support sustainable development. This process requires integrating sustainability principles into curricula, broadening access to quality education, and reinforcing links between education systems and labor markets. Furthermore, effective policy coordination across sectors is necessary to align education, employment, and social protection systems. Global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasize these interconnections by considering education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8), and poverty alleviation (SDG 1).

6 Conclusion

In the context of globalization, livelihood security has been increasingly dependent on the dynamic relationship between education systems and skills development. Education serves not only as a pathway to employment but also as a foundation for adaptability and resilience in rapidly changing economies. Education systems should be more flexible, inclusive, and responsive to changing skill requirements to address the challenges of globalization. Prioritizing lifelong learning as a central policy objective and ensuring equitable access to skills development for all groups of society should be the focus. These integrated strategies would contribute effectively to sustainable and equitable livelihood security.

7 Ethical statements

Not applicable.

8 Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

9 Data availability statement

Not applicable.

10 Author contributions

J. Sen: Conceptualization, and writing – original draft. P. Sarkar: Writing – review & editing. S. Das: Writing – review & editing. The authors approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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